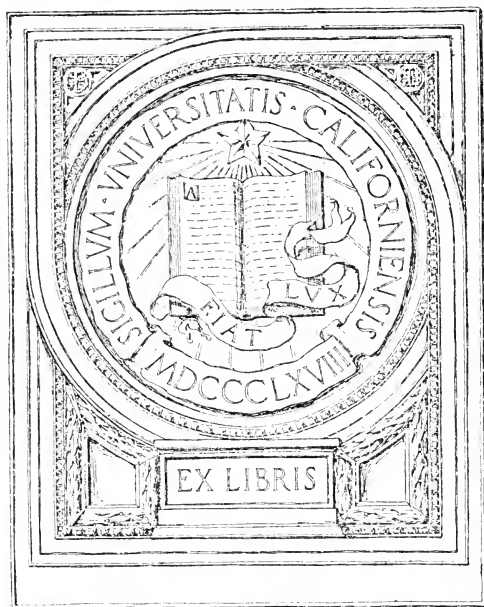


IRIS.



The Romance
OF AN
Opal Ring



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"THIS RING SHE LEFT, AND WITH IT LOVE."

[Frontispiece.]

I R I S:

THE ROMANCE OF AN OPAL RING.

BY

Mrs. M. ^{*any*} B. M. TOLAND.

WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS.



PHILADELPHIA:

J. B. LIPPINCOTT & CO.

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ENGRAVED BY JAS. W. LAUDERBACH.

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I R I S:

THE ROMANCE OF AN OPAL RING.



CANTO FIRST.

I.

BRIGHT was the bosom of the Kennebec;
Its wayward waters dashed along the shore
And surged in wavelets, crowned with foam and fleck
That nodded snowy plumes their surface o'er.
Chained to the bank, and dancing on the tide,
Was a small boat that swayed in measures gay;
As a wild steed in fiery, uncurbed pride,
Champs at his bit, impatient of delay,
So struggled that frail craft to break away,
Cresting its prow in wreaths of downy spray.

II.

A tall young man in rustic garb was there,
As if in waiting, near a mystic cove;

Of noble form, black eyes and dark-brown hair—

A manly beauty, such as maidens love ;
Strong Grecian features, that a smile or frown

Would change to sunshine or a darker hue :

He was the boast of all that country town,

Renowned in Nimrod sports, brave, honest, true,
He tilled the land, his nets for fish he drew,
Nor were his hours of studious leisure few.

III.

There was a shade of sadness on his face

Too deep for one so full of life as he,
That showed a hidden sorrow had its place

From which he'd not the strength his heart to free.
The waning day had reached the sunset hour ;

Phœbus his golden beams in crimson furled,
Withdrew their light, as closes some fair flower,

To hide his beauty from this lower world ;
His parting rays upon the waters purled,
As he away in glowing splendor whirled.

I V.

An only son : his heritage, the land,
Broad fields and forest stretching to the shore,
Small income yielded ; and his shapely hand
The sun-browned hue of honest labor wore :
His name was Rozmer, Langdon : near the wood
The stately mansion-house where he was born
In all its hoary grimness frowning stood,
Its crenelated mouldings fretted, torn,
Its roughened tiles, its oaken thresholds worn
By passing footsteps for a century borne.

V.

Rozmer, with his black, restless, glancing eyes,
Gleaned the pure beauties of all thought sublime ;
With waking dawn he from his couch would rise
To write sweet sonnets in his untaught rhyme.
'Squire Langdon—none knew whence his title came,
Unless inherited with the old place,
(For sire and grandsire too had worn the same,
That he assumed with such becoming grace)—

He could among the musty parchments trace
A blazoned crest, with an uplifted mace.

VI.

He labored hard, in his grand, pompous way,
To keep the style conformed to his estate—
In old-time etiquette his court to pay,
Unmindful of the cold decrees of fate;
He deemed himself familiar with the law;
Blackstone his mentor was in legal lore;
With comprehension keen he plainly saw
The right from wrong, and yet for hours he'd pore
Each well-worn page of codes and ethics o'er,
To puzzle his opponent all the more.

VII.

His wife was amiable—the worthy pair
Had wants so few they deemed not hard their lot:
Rozmer their idol; and 'twas their first care
To make him happy in that lonely spot:
For him were guests invited every spring,

The old house waking with the birds and flowers ;
The social life these friends were sure to bring
Wove joy and sunshine with the fleeting hours,
Converted rural gloom to fairy bowers,
And blended music with the falling showers.

VIII.

Among the guests was one of merry wit,
Bright sparkling as her own blue beaming eyes ;
She in his boat with Rozmer oft would sit
And weave her charm in fancy's varied dyes :
Brilliant and beautiful, she well became
The name of Iris, that her learned sire
Had chosen for her—'twas the classic name
Of winged goddess : Rozmer did admire,
Yet vainly tried to check the fond desire—
To hopes so high he hardly dared aspire.

IX.

Proud was her family, of lineage old,
With wealth and beauty added to the name ;

Renowned in deeds of chivalry oft told

Stood Vincent Albey on the scroll of fame:

He died when Iris was a little child;

Her widowed mother to the North would bring
Her cherished darling, when the summer smiled

On the unfolded beauties of the spring,
And bud and blossom did sweet incense fling,
And happy hours flew by with hasty wing.

x.

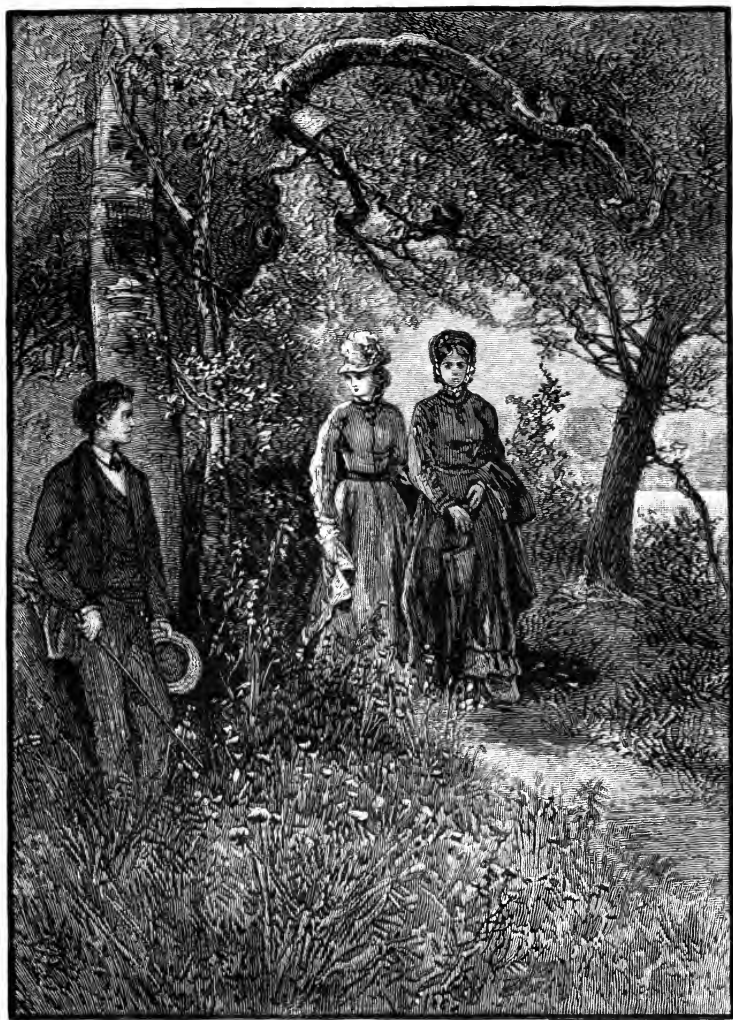
Until that season, all had gone quite well

In rural pastime through each lengthened day.
Iris was now sixteen, and who shall tell

What lurking dangers haunt a maiden's way?
Her mother thought of Rozmer with a fear

That made more vigilant maternal care:
With his proud bearing he might well appear

A hero to her child; his talents rare,
His manners courtly—might he then not dare
To rob her of her precious daughter fair?



"THEN STOOD ERECT, TO WATCH A LOVELY MAID."

XI.

Though much against her pleasure, she'd not fail
To join their rambles in the evening light :
That day he had proposed a farewell sail ;
The indulgent dame her duty would not slight.
The tide was high when Rozmer took his stand,
Watching the waves recede along the shore ;
Waiting an hour impatiently, he scanned
With burning thoughts his doubtful future o'er,
'Mid hopes and fears that wild confusion bore
To joys forbidden ever, ever more.

XII.

Our hero whistled, as he waited on,
In low, sad tone, so sweet that o'er his head
A nest of squirrels had been fairly won,
And, as they listened, burrs and nuts they shed ;
Then stood erect, to watch a lovely maid
Glide through the scented path in merry glee ;
The squirrels had no need to be afraid
Of anything so beautiful as she,

Yet swiftly scampered up the tall beech-tree,
And swayed its topmost twigs in mockery.

XIII.

Her dress was white; the misty fabric, hung
O'er rounded limbs just free from childhood's play,
Floated in graceful folds the ferns among,
Impearled with dew-drops gleaned along the way;
Her manner, dignified in calm repose,
Was winning, sprightly in her girlish play;
Her comely face was flushed with deeper rose,
As though it caught the glow of setting day
That cast its crimson blushes o'er the spray,
Blending a warmth with twilight's sober gray.

XIV.

She was attended by the anxious dame,
Fretting and stumbling with bewildered care.
"Oh, dear," she cried, "my foot is turned! I'm lame!"
"Mamma, take heed; of these deep ruts beware;
Let me assist you;" Iris kindly said;

“’Tis very wrong of me to cause you pain.”
She then with slackened pace the matron led
Through mossy lawn to path more smooth and plain ;
But all her tenderness had been in vain
To quiet that good lady’s nerves again.

X V.

At their approach all changed was Rozmer’s mood;
The clouds of sadness vanished that he wore ;
Smiling with genial greeting, there he stood
Ready to launch his boat from off the shore.
“Good evening, Rozmer, lo! we come at last
To sail with you upon the waters bright;
But we must haste, the day is fading fast;
See, Hesper ushers the approaching night.
Mamma does not in sailing much delight:
Should we be late, ’twould give her such a fright.”

X V I.

The ebbing tide, receding from the shore,
Left the boat motionless upon the sand ;

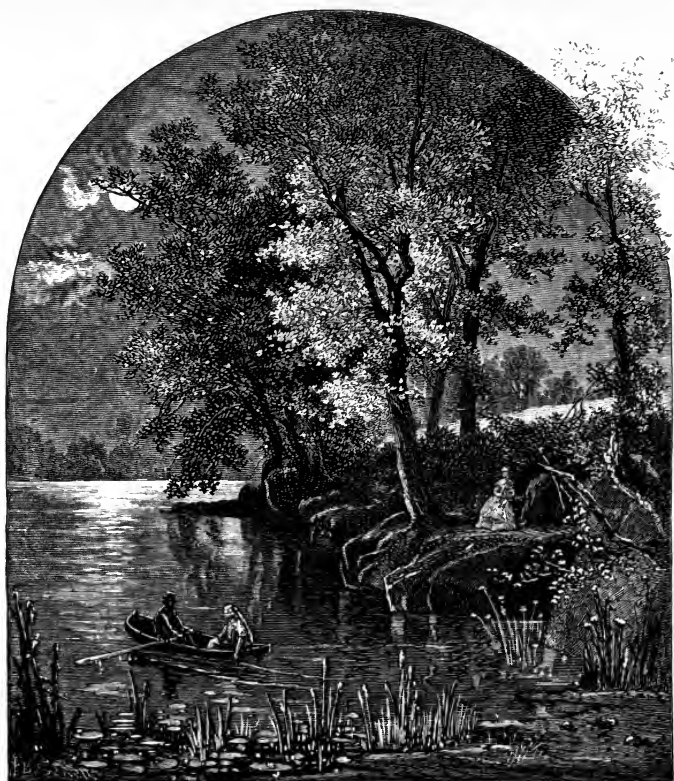
No more the waves their crested foam-wreaths wore,
They slept, as silenced by divine command.
The dame demurred at both the boat and hour ;
"I'll wait," she said, "upon the river side,
In the protection of this cedar bower ;
Here I can watch you o'er the waters glide :
You'll not go far, my dear ; you know, beside,
It always makes me sick in boats to ride."

XVII.

The good dame had her wish and even more,
They left her there secure from every harm.
Rozmer the mirthful Iris gently bore,
Firmly supported by his stalwart arm,
Out to the boat ; then launched it from its rest,
And doffed his coat to spread beneath her feet,
That, thankless for the service, lightly pressed
The garment, fragrant with the clover sweet.
She wondered, when his glance she chanced to meet,
Why he her smiles in sullen mood should greet.

XVIII.

They floated on near sylvan grottoes fair,
'Neath drooping branches forming Undine's cave.



"And in her playful dalliance caressed the plashing ripples."

Nature her choicest charms had lavished there,
And to the scene a dreamy beauty gave.

Iris was happy as a little child,
Her laughing eyes her merry mood expressed;
She chatted gaily, dipped her hand and smiled
In the bright waters all in silver dressed,
And in her playful dalliance caressed
The plashing ripples with their quivering crest.

XIX.

Rozmer sat wrapt in silence until they
Had passed beyond the reach of other ears,
While she, with guileless, gleeful pleasure gay,
Laughed at her mother's over-anxious fears:
She did not look at him; had she done so
And marked his brow, contracted by distress,
Her woman's instincts would have made her know
Why he provoked her witty sallies less,
Why curtly answered with a "no" or "yes"
The reason that to her he'd ne'er confess.

X X.

"O what a glorious eve! How calm, how still,

The drowsy waves lie sleeping on the breast
Of this grand river!—in its mighty will

It gathers them, as children, to their rest.

Look, how this moonbeam forms a quivering heart!

Ah! now 'tis gone, destroyed and vanished quite,
And of the other ripples forms a part.

I've caught one now—oh, see how purely bright
It shimmers, like a dancing water-sprite,
Blending its lustre with the stars' pale light!"

X X I.

Thus Iris chatted on in accents sweet

As rippling murmurs of the parted tide
That dashed along as if afraid to meet

The sturdy oars dipped low on either side.

"Rozmer, just listen while I read your fate:

You've grown so dull, I can't continue glad
In solemn presence such as yours of late;

From very sympathy, one must be sad:

You have become a very doleful lad ;
I fear you're moon-struck and will soon be mad.

XXII.

"See, I will set this lily-leaf afloat
And let it show your future destiny ;
Imagine you are on the tiny boat,
Floating across life's ever-changing sea :
Look how it sails ; thus you will fortune brave,
And onward glide until the final day :
Be careful ! don't upset it by a wave,
Nor with your oars make such a splashing spray ;
It follows us along the furrowed way,
And bounds as lightly as a lamb at play.

XXIII.

"Still silent ? Fie, oh, shame, on my last night !
The very frogs do croak a farewell lay.
Invoke thy muse, good Rozmer ; please recite
Or sing to me a song of nymph or fay."
He at her bidding crossed one dripping oar,
The other firmly held with one brown hand

To steer his light canoe more safely o'er
The hidden rocks ; then sang at her command
A naiad's song: the echoes on the land
Prolonged the music with their elfin band.

X X I V.

S O N G.

From the tide

By my side

Fair Undine arose :

Vision bright,

Lovely sprite,

In her graceful pose,

Floated near,

Without fear ;

Thus she whispered me :

“ Hard thy lot,

Thou hast sought

That which cannot be.

X X V.

“ Not above

Seek thy love

In the starry skies ;
Not below
Waters' flow—
He who seeks us dies.
Beauties cold
We unfold,
Therefore woo us not ;
Seek thine own,
Leave alone
What is vainly sought."

X X V I.

She clapped her little hands in perfect glee :
"Brave poet, laurels thy young brow shall crown !
You ne'er before sang song so sweet for me.
How did your hero his great sorrow drown ?
Did he for ever after leave alone
Undine to gather shells beneath the deep ?
Or did he for his rashness then atone,
And for some earth-born nymph his fancy keep ?"
He answered: "He awoke, and tried to sweep
The glamour from his mind, as dreams of sleep.

XXVII.

"I, too, have lived in dreams of hope and fear,
Since first a goddess came to bless our bowers;
She does not care for me, or hold me dear,
But as a toy to cheer her duller hours."
And as he spoke, a bitter, taunting scorn
Gave to his words a meaning hard to bear:
"What am I—I, a rustic farmer born—
That I, in even dream of love, should dare
To covet for my own such beauty rare,
Or wish that she my struggling lot should share?"

XXVIII.

Iris sat silent—as the lily, pale—
The waters in their placid beauty lay
Covered with moonbeams, like a silver veil
That rippled in its misty folds away:
Through her young heart there shot an icy chill;
Was this the Rozmer she had known so long?
At once to crush by his strong iron will
The love that tuned so passionate a song?

She thought him cruel, for she knew no wrong,
And begged that he their sail would not prolong.

X X I X.

Her mother wondered at their quick return—
She marked the sudden change in Iris' mood;
In her solicitude the cause to learn,
Her daughter's early confidence she wooed
(Rozmer had dared his rustic suit to press;
Iris was true to family and state;
For him she sighed, and wished his love were less;
She could not but condole his hapless fate);
With words of fond endearment and caress,
She questioned Iris, who would not confess.

X X X.

Rozmer, when they were safe at home, returned,
Sprang in his boat, and pushed off far and fast;
His rapid strokes his brown hands blistered, burned,
As o'er the heaving tide he swiftly passed;

And faster yet his maddening course he sped,
And would beguile by earnest toil his grief;
The cooling dews fell lightly on his head,
But to his fevered brow brought no relief;—
Rowed by too careless hand, on sunken reef
His boat careened, and closed his journey brief.

XXXI.

The boat o'erturned, with gurgling sigh and splash,
Near a small island in the river's close.
Confused and nearly drowned by sudden dash
In the dark water, Rozmer struggling rose,
Swam to a willow branch, that drooping swung
To kiss its shadow mirrored in the deep;
He climbed the mossy bank, wild vines among,
Through tangled growth along the pathway steep;
Then, as if waking from a troubled sleep,
Let his sad glances o'er the broad waste sweep.

XXXII.

"Float on!" he cried; "oblivious waters, close
Thus o'er my heart, to drown its agony!"

Fain would I still its wildly beating throes,
And drift through life as thou dost drift from me.”
“What er ye doin’ thar?” a fisher cried;
“Yew hadent orter talk t’ yerself thet way:
Upset yer skiff, hev ye? In this yere tide
’Twill drift way aout to sea afore ’tis day;
Look here naow, mister, don’t yer scoot away—
I’ll leave my net an’ pole ye hum, I say.”

XXXIII.

Rozmer deigned no reply, but disappeared
In the thick wildwood, dripping as he went,
With clay and water-weeds his garments smeared;
Up winding path his weary steps he bent
To a small cot, and there a welcome found:
The farmer shared of all he had the best,
Gave thanks to God his friend had not been drowned:
In dry, warm flannels quickly had him dressed,
And food and cordial brought his shivering guest,
And yielded his own bed for him to rest.

XXXIV.

“What is it, brother? Am I needed, too?”

“No, Fanny;—only Rozmer, lacking faith
To walk upon the waters, swam them through;
He just appeared to me, a dripping wraith;
He struck the reef out near the channel, where
He left the water-sprites his boat to keep,
And came to us. I’ve given him good care;
Let the fair Iris watch for him and weep,
Her tearful glances o’er the waters sweep,
While you your blue eyes close in peaceful sleep.
Good-night!”



CANTO SECOND.

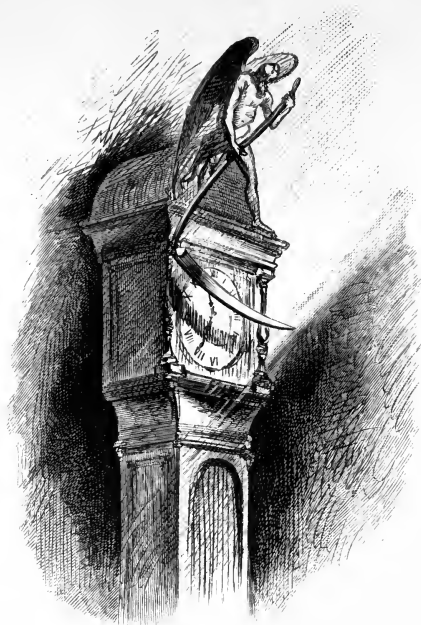
I.

THE sunshine glanced the casement through,
Illumed the clock—the old bronze Time
That every second deftly drew
His scythe, with ticking measured chime,
Beside the panelled wall.
Breakfast was on the table spread,
And all assembled, saving one.
“Has Rozmer not yet left his bed?”
‘Squire Langdon asked. “What keeps our son?
I’ll give the lad a call.”

II.

With hurried step he climbed each stair,
Up the long winding way and steep;

The room was undisturbed, and where
Was his dear boy—where did he sleep?



" Illumed the clock—the old bronze Time."

He trembled as he stood,
Then rushed again to those below,
His gray eyes gleaming with affright:
"Mother, I'll to the river go:
Rozmer did not return last night;
I fear this bodes no good."

III.

It was not far he had to go ;

He met his son in strange disguise,
Walking with doubtful step and slow.

The 'Squire stopped in great surprise,
Although relieved and glad :

"Rozmer, what means this masquerade ?

Where have you tarried all the night ?
A very sorry trick you've played

Your father, boy ! It was not right,—
We thought we'd lost you, lad."

IV.

"Not quite so bad as that, you see ;

Only my dear old boat is lost,
Last night upset and drifted free,

As near Swan Island reef I crossed—

But please don't mention this ;
Don't say a word when you get home

Of my mishap, but only say

The reason why I did not come,
To yonder isle I went to stay
With James and Fanny Bliss.



"He met his son in strange disguise."

v.

"'Tis true my boat did head that way,
And none need know that I came back:
I go to change this suit, and pay
The visit, that your truth won't lack—
I'll of this garb dispose."

In sooth it was a grand display,
A fine blue coat, antique and long,
Large buttons in their bright array,
Of good old-fashioned size, and strong
Knee-breeches and buff hose.

vi.

His mother waited near the urn,
Each cup she filled up to its brim,
Yet oft to listen she would turn,
With anxious tears her dark eyes dim;
Iris looked very sad.
Profuse in sympathy, verbose
Was Mistress Albey in excuse;

She said: "He found the night so close,
Perhaps he took a moonlight cruise—
He's such a restless lad.

VII.

"I wished so much to thank your son—
Please say good-bye to him for me;
Iris, my dear, we must be gone.
Good-bye—ah! here's the 'Squire, I see,
To solve the mystery;—
"What news?" His mother's anxious glance
Read hope and pleasure and surprise;
The 'Squire laughed, and said: "Perchance—"
Then stopped, and winked with both his eyes—
"Perchance 'tis destiny.

VIII.

"Rozmer last night—I have been told
By one who knows—was at Swan Isle,
Where dwells a lass with hair like gold,
Blue eyes, fair face, and winsome smile,—
The pretty Fanny Bliss."

He rubbed his hands complacently.

“Ladies, I sanction Rozmer’s choice;

A welcome daughter she will be:

I, as a father, must rejoice

In such good news as this.”

I X.

Iris was standing on the green;

She hastened from the carriage-door;

A conscious blush might have been seen

Flame through the heavy veil she wore,

As she approached his side.

“My dear good friend, can this be true?

Congratulate them both for me.”

An opal ring she trembling drew

From off her finger hastily:

“Present this to the bride!”

X.

Her mother said: “We wish them joy;

He should have told us this before:

This quite accounts—the naughty boy!—

For all the anxious clouds he wore,

The dawning of his love.”

Just as they waved their last adieu,

Young Rozmer, looking pale and grim,

Advanced the open portal through:

Smiling, the 'Squire glanced up at him,

Hoping that he'd approve.

XI.

The full veins swelled across his brow,

As if they'd burst with rage confined.

“Father!” he cried, “how could you throw

So false a glamour o'er the mind

Of one I love as life?

You know your story is not true;

'Tis false this fate you weave for me:

I little thought, in trusting you,

That such a simple mystery

With danger could be rife.”

XII.

The 'Squire, disgusted, left the room,
But soon returned to plead his cause:
" 'Tis folly thus our hopes to doom;
Rozmer, beware! one moment pause,
Don't stoop to artifice:
Iris, your station far above,
Regards you only as a friend;
This ring she left, and with it love—
A wedding gift she wished to send
To pretty Fanny Bliss."

XIII.

He seized the ring in wild despair
And kissed the opal, blushing deep,
Prismatic-tinted hues as fair
As o'er the rainbow's arches sweep:
"A scintillating gem!
Never was 'promise-bow' to man
More baseless than all this must seem;

This token into flames will fan
The love that I dare only dream:
'Tis worth a diadem.

XIV.

"Bright, crystallized, pathetic tear,
You caught her blushes as you fell!
With trembling light of love and fear,
Hold o'er my heart, your magic spell
Till death shall set me free!"
The 'Squire stamped his foot, and said:
"Have done with poet nonsense, child!
In hopeless love you've lost your head;
You speak in strains so foolish, wild,
Of things that cannot be.

XV

"Come to the barn with me awhile,
And help the boys to thresh out wheat:
Labor will love-sick thoughts beguile;
The swinging flail will soonest beat
Such nonsense from your mind."

Rozmer his sire would not obey;
He calmly answered: "Father, no!
I go not to thresh wheat to-day,
Neither to reap the grain nor sow,
Nor the full ears to bind.

XVI.

"Too long I've tilled the land in vain;
A rustic drudge I've toiled and slaved
For mere subsistence! Where's the gain?
I see no way to fortune paved;—
We keep poor all the same.
I'm now of age; the die is cast!
There's that within my bosom burns
That loathes the labor of the past
And for a brighter future yearns;
I go to win a name!"

XVII.

The bird had left his lonely nest,
To other worlds had winged his flight;

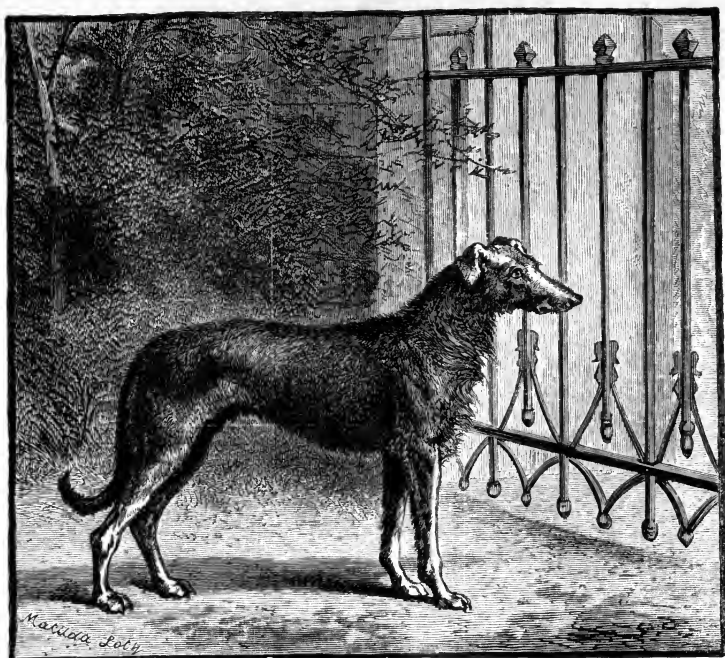
His mother hoped 'twas for the best,
His father would not think it right,
This madcap thirst for fame:
Fanny, a bashful country girl,
With rosy cheeks and eyes of blue,
And many a clustering golden curl,
Illumed with sunshine gleaming through,
To cheer them often came.

XVIII.

But there was one—his canine friend
In field of labor, rest or play—
That could his wishes comprehend,
Until that last sad parting day
When he was left behind;
A stag-hound, "gray as misty morn,"
Once the brave leader of the chase,
But now with age so lame and worn
To him they gave the honored place
Within the grounds confined.

XIX.

Poor, dear old Prince, one last adieu!
Then with a mournful mien he crept



" His vigils constantly he kept."

Out to the gate: a guardian true,
His vigils constantly he kept,
Watching for his return.

'Twas pitiful to see him there,
In storm or sunshine, every day,
Unless, by force of tender care,
Compelled within the house to stay,
In his mute grief to mourn.



CANTO THIRD.

I.

WITHIN a room scarce fit for owl or bat,
A mean, rude attic, gloomy, bleak and drear,
Our hero Rozmer in deep study sat;
Papers and manuscripts were scattered near;
One wasted taper gave a feeble light,
With flickering flame consuming fast away;
The wind sighed sadly through the clouded night,
From rifted roof the rain, in ceaseless play,
Fell pattering on the floor.

II

How changed was he since he had left his home
To meet the frowns of this his other world,
Among strange fields of literature to roam,
And brave the poisoned shafts by envy hurled!

His brow was pale, and in the ghostly light
Contrasted weirdly with his dark-brown hair;



"Our hero Rozmer in deep study sat."

His large black eyes blazed in their sockets, bright
As stars of midnight in their beauty rare;
He coned his labors o'er.

III.

The miserable garret, nearly bare
Of every comfort, save an old straw bed,
One rough pine table, and a broken chair;
No draperies save those the spiders spread
From beam to beam, their webs of finest lace,
O'er dingy windows looking to the skies.
There he at last had found a resting-place;
There wealth of thought from poverty would rise,
As Phoenix from her flame.

IV.

There toiled he through each weary day and night,
As diamond-seeker delves in darksome mine;
In the dim vista, hope, a beacon-light
Oft through the lowering clouds would brightly shine.
As dying lamp emits a brilliant flame,
So, purified by poverty and gloom,
An inspiration to the poet came
That loosed the fetters of his seeming doom
To bring him wealth and fame.

v.

He wrote a poem called "The Magic Ring."

With all the potent influence of truth,
His fancy did his own sad story bring
Of lady fair and ardent rustic youth,
Pictured the talisman's most fatal power
That banished all his fondest hopes awhile,
Until the genii, as a final dower,
Caused the fair lady on his suit to smile,
And the loved prize he won.

vi.

His story, in such graceful measures told,
Touched every heart; and as the praises came—
The unsought tribute from the veterans old,
Great warriors in the fields of lyric fame—
He felt as one awaking from a trance;
Dazzled by sudden brightness 'mid the gloom,
He thought it unreality,—perchance
An idle dream to mock a hopeless doom,—
And would all favors shun.

VII.

There was a conflict, but he won at last—
Revived by fortune's favors; while he wrote
To his dear parents of his dreary past,
He ended in a cheerful, happy note,
Enclosed his book to give them pride and joy,
With more substantial presents that he sent:
His mother o'er his book would bless her boy,
But the stern 'Squire would not the least relent
From his reproachful mood.

VIII.

So said his letters; and not only this,
But that he'd not excuse the foolish lad,
Nor would he show the book to Fanny Bliss,
For he had hoped his folly not so bad
As he had made it look in printed verse.
He wrote: "By authorship you've nothing won;—
I fear, my boy, you go from bad to worse;
This prating to the world what you have done
Will never end in good."

IX.

Courage with Rozmer's better fortune grew;
He sent to Iris, with the author's name,
His little book that such attention drew,
As harbinger of his unlooked-for fame.
When months had passed, and yet no answer came
From her, the angel of his fancy's dream,
His own presumption only could he blame,
For his romance might arrogantly seem
To blend their destiny.

X.

Disgusted with himself, he went away,
And sought in change of clime and scene relief;
Alone through foreign lands he fain would stray,
And would beguile by novelty his grief;
His mind from monuments of art sublime
Drank inspiration and ennobling grace;
Yet true as Petrarch—bard of softest rhyme—
He ne'er dethroned his idol from her place;
There she must ever be.

CANTO FOURTH.

I.

'TWAS Sabbath morn. A carriage might be seen
With Iris and her mother on their way :
Homeward they drove beneath the foliage green
Of feathery palms, in graceful fan-like sway,
And countless blossoms of that Southern clime ;
St. Michael's bells awoke the drowsy day
In tuneful cadence of their joyous chime,
Like friendly voices that appeared to say
" Wel—come—home ! wel—come—home ! "

II.

From out the window Iris gazed around,
Her face illumined with a fond delight ;
" A welcome meet, thy dear familiar sound,
Grand old St. Michael, glorious in thy might !

No 'strain so sweet I've heard in foreign clime;
All other notes its melody excels;
Hark to the music of the pealing chime,
The thrilling cadence of the joyous bells!
They seem to bid us welcome."

III.

The gnarléd oaks their giant branches spread,
Veiled in gray mosses waving to and fro;
Between the antlers of each stag-like head
Bloomed, like a coronet, the mistletoe;
Dark green the leaves, a tiny crown impearled
Gleamed on the misty pendants swaying there,
Above the hoary bark that stiffly curled,
Incrusted by the heat and moistened air
Of many, many years.

IV.

Magnolias in their regal beauty stood,
Yielding their fragrance to the morning breeze;
Unnumbered singing birds poured forth a flood
Of sweetest music from the stately trees;

Camellia borders and azalea flowers,
The varied beauties of that favored clime,
Rose from the carpet to the sylvan bowers
Of soft green mosses and the sweet wild thyme,
Bright with their dewy tears.

V.

To their fair Southern home they came at last,
'Mid smiling slaves that near the carriage drew,
Making obeisance as they onward passed;
In their dark faces beamed a welcome true.
On, on they pressed, with eager pattering feet,
All in their best attire, with kerchiefs gay,
Each struggling with the others to compete,
From toddling children to the veterans gray,
Shouting their "How-de-do!"

VI.

The princely mansion with its frescoed walls,
Rich in its tapestries and art sublime;
Statues and paintings lined the spacious halls,
With antique vases wrought in Raphael's time:

The imposing entrance with its massive door,
Fit emblem of the bounty there bestowed,



"In their dark faces beamed a welcome true."

An air of genial welcome ever wore,
From the broad steps to the embowered road,
Of greeting cordial, true.

VII.

A chorus of glad voices welcomed them,
Some thanking God in touching, plaintive tone :
“Dey’s come, oh, bressed Lord! Oh, Bref-fla-hem!
Tank God dey’s heah to be no more so lone!”
They rolled, swayed, sprang about, in wildest cheer,
Until the carriage stopped: and waiting there
Stood the old nurse, to greet her ladies dear;
All eagerness to show her tender care,
She clasped them to her breast.

VIII.

The ladies, grateful for the love expressed,
That Sabbath day of undisturbed repose,
Like petted children, fondly were caressed,
From early dawn until the evening’s close:
Old Mammy’s face beamed with supreme delight;
With hearty outburst of devoted love,
She cried: “Pears like I dun can’t sleep ter-night;
I’s e gis a gwine ter tank de Lor above
Fur dem I lubs de best.”

I X.

"Cooter, tell me of all the news you know ;

I am so glad to be at home again."

"My chile! Why, honey, why for you dun go?

'Pears like 'twas only jist er gib us pain.

Why, chile! I jis done nuffin else but cry,

And now I laugh all time cause you am heah."

"You dear old stupid! What has happened? Try

To think of something—even this last year—

That I'd be glad to know.

X.

"Daphne, unpack our boxes ; we have brought

Presents for every one upon the place."

At the word presents, Mamma Cooter sought

In her dull brain some pleasing news to trace

That would bring favor in the gifts bestowed.

"My chile!—why, dat ar am a fac; dat's true,

Dar was a bundle, all gummed up, I knowed

Dun cum—way long go—by pos' fur you;

I'll bring it heah to show."

.XI.

“The poem of ‘The Magic Ring!’ The book
I’ve wished so much to get,—and sent to me?”
As on the fly-leaf then she chanced to look,
She clapped her jewelled hands in perfect glee:
“From Rozmer! dreamy Rozmer of the North!
He! he an author, with his rough, hard hands!
The world of letters loud proclaims the worth
Of the dear poet. As a prince he stands
In realms of poesy.

XII.

“Ah me! It seems but yesterday, poor boy,
Since our last sail, when he so nearly had
Made me believe I was his only joy—
I thought his treatment very, very bad;
Such an odd way that surely was of his
To broach the subject that he soon would wed
The Island beauty, pretty Fanny Bliss;—
Now I remember, with my farewell said,
I left my opal ring.

XIII.

“Yes, left it for his lovely rustic bride:—

I’ll read his precious gift with pleasure great.



“She read the touching story of his hopeless love.”

Oft in his boat, upon the swelling tide

Of that grand river, he has told the fate

Of phantom groom and nymph or naiad fair ;
He would recite to me or sing his song—
His own wild verses, as we floated there,
By sylvan bowers and shady banks along :—
I loved to hear him sing.”

XIV.

Thus she soliloquized, until she read
The touching story of his hopeless love,
Then checked her breathing, bowed her queenly head ;
As she perused the theme, she vainly strove
To still the tumult in her bosom stirred,
Until the story's close, and he restored
The treasured gift that friendship had conferred ;
Blushing she faltered o'er each burning word,
And mourned the more her loss.

XV.

Long sat she silent, then exclaimed : “ Too late !
His gift neglected through three long, long years !
'Tis only some mad freak of cruel fate
To torture me with all these doubts and fears.

Dear, noble Rozmer! I have heartless seemed
When only merry girlish thoughts were mine.
Had I of your devotion even dreamed,
A beacon star for you would brightly shine
From this your Southern Cross."

XVI.

She wrote to thank him for his book, and then
Told him that they were absent when it came.
Her fingers trembled on her golden pen;—
Writing a formal letter was so tame:
She sat confused with mingled hope and fear,
Recounted first their travels, their return,
Then wrote: "For all the scenes to memory dear—
For childhood's sunny hours—I often yearn,
And pleasures passed away."

XVII.

Then to her mother with a timid grace
She went, and placed the treasure in her hands,
With radiant gladness beaming o'er her face.
At first the lady could not understand:

“What is it, darling? Ah! that famous book,
‘The Magic Ring!’ I’m glad of something new.
A pretty volume; o’er a page I’ll look,
And if it pleases me I’ll read it through;
’Twill cheer me this dull day.”

XVIII.

She read the book with pleasure and surprise,
The more so at the tell-tale blushes deep,
The conscious glances of two sparkling eyes
That could not from her any longer keep
Her daughter’s new-found joy; “Mamma!” she cried,
“I never even dreamed of love till now:
This sweet delight,—this waking-dreamy pride;—
And since I know his love, I plight my vow
To share his destiny.”

XIX.

She clasped her mother’s neck in long embrace,
And lavished countless kisses on her cheek,
Tumbled a wealth of finest Brussels lace,
And for a long time would not let her speak;

Until, what with so tightly hugging her,
Her eager whispers and her fond caress
Set the good lady's ears in such a whirr
That she was glad at last her love to bless,
With ruffled dignity.

X X.

Rozmer preferred his wishes to the dame,
Urged with the fervid eloquence of love;
He craved that she the earliest day would name,
And vowed by every word and deed to prove
His life-long gratitude, if she'd bestow
The gracious promise of her daughter's hand;
How great his love the world could never know,—
No other passion could one thought command,
Awaking or asleep.

X X I.

She wrote an old-time, stately letter—told
The brave young author he had won his prize:
She had enough for both to share her gold.—
With well-bred courtesy, both kind and wise,

Bade him the 'Squire and Mrs. Langdon bring ;

She would return their hospitality.

“Pray, bring with you that precious Opal Ring—

That magic emblem of fatality ;

Its charm we fain would keep.”



CANTO FIFTH.

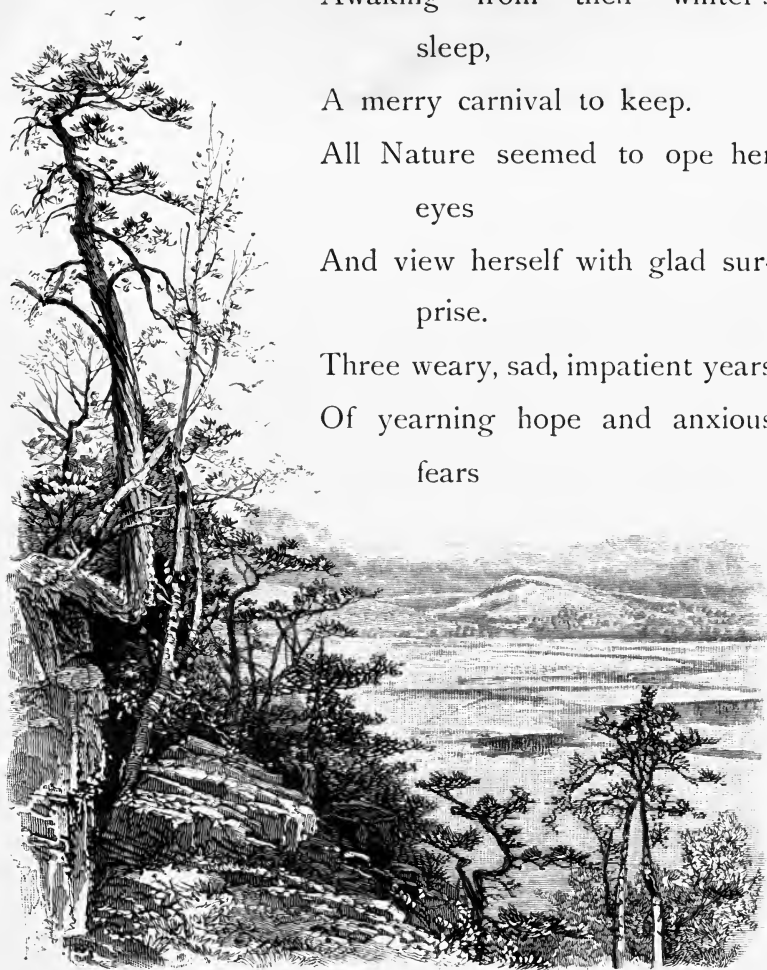
I.

THE Frost King doffed his crystal crown,
And laid his icy sceptre down
Before the Spring as Easter Queen,
In flowing robes of emerald green;
Trailing arbutus, pure and sweet,
Blushed through the mosses at her feet;
The mountains doffed their caps of snow
To the green nodding groves below;
The ermine cloak spread far and wide
Dissolved away in purling tide;
The bridge of ice as plate-glass lay
In broken squares to drift away.

II.

The robin-redbreast's lusty song
Echoed in cadence shrill and long;

The crickets chirped; the croaking frogs
Joined in the chorus from their bogs,
Awaking from their winter's
sleep,
A merry carnival to keep.
All Nature seemed to ope her
eyes
And view herself with glad sur-
prise.
Three weary, sad, impatient years
Of yearning hope and anxious
fears



"The bridge of ice as plate-glass lay."

That lonely couple waited there,
Threading each brow with lines of care.

III.

When letters to their Rozmer came—
Rozmer, that dear, that cherished name!
The 'Squire wrote his last address,
And sent them off by post express,
And wondered much from whom they came,
Whether Miss Albey or the dame.
The lengthened days and sunny hours
Covered the fields with countless flowers;
Trees spread their leafy canopies;
Stiff hemlocks pointed to the skies;
The tasselled pines with graceful ease
Dallied with every passing breeze.

IV.

Cedars were grouped in cozy bowers
With coronet-like buds of flowers;
And silver birches ranged in rows,
Incased with bark like drifting snows;

Coquetting maples, light and gay,
Like careless children at their play;
Clusters of fern-like mountain ash
Stood listening to the river's splash,
And arched their boughs of darker hue
To wild clematis climbing through,
Its plumous dove-like flowers seen
Like sea-foam 'mong the leaves of green.

v.

The bobolink, with mantle white,
His other plumage black as night,
Soared o'er the globes of clover red,
Whose shamrock leaves a shelter spread
Above a little moss-built nest,
Where sat his mate with mottled breast
Guarding her tiny fledglings young:
To her a wondrous song he sung,
Uprising in his joyous glee,
To waft the glorious melody,
In liquid notes so sweet, so clear,
That all of life would pause to hear.

VI.

Gay humming-birds with glancing flight,
Their necks ablaze with colors bright,
With flaming red, gold, bronze, and green,
Were sipping cups of eglantine.
One lovely day, at early dawn,
Rozmer came walking up the lawn.
Rozmer, more graceful, noble, hale,
With pleasure viewed his native vale.
Unlike the rustic youth of old,
And yet in bearing quite as bold,
Touched by a genial air refined,
As if reflected from his mind.

VII.

Old Prince, the first with joy to greet,
Sprang whimpering to his master's feet;
His dear old pet, his childhood's friend,
Whose love with life would only end,
To meet him, rushed with fawning bound,
But sank exhausted to the ground,

Where, as entranced, he stiffly lay,
Until his spirit passed away.
Spirit? Yes, spirit. Reader, pause
Before imputing breach of laws;
A dog with human reasoning mind,
Such as was his, so faithful, kind,
To die of joy! Rozmer would say,
Spirit immortal passed away.

VIII.

Then came a burst of rapture true,
That echoed the dense forest through,
As with a lingering fond embrace
His mother kissed his lips, his face:
"My boy! My precious, noble boy!
O God! I thank thee for this joy!
Rozmer our darling, home again!"
The 'Squire could not his wrath maintain;
He fondly clasped him to his breast,
Choked back his tears, and said: "'Twas best,
All for the best, my son, although
For me 'twas hard to think it so."

IX.

“Rozmer, a letter came to-day
From Mistress Albey; I should say,
By her desire Miss Albey wrote—
Ah’m! what’s the matter with my throat?—
Wrote to invite us both to pay
A visit at an early day;”
Then added, with a doubting smile:
“But how can we afford such style?”
“Afford it, father? To be sure
We can, for I’m no longer poor;
My work has paid me well, and we
From such reflections must be free.

X.

“Iris has promised to be mine—
My light of love, through life to shine.”
“Ah’m!—ah!—ah’m!—I, as you spoke,
Swallowed a straw;—I nearly choke!
But, Rozmer, you are true as steel:
I wonder how will Fanny feel?

Ah! see, she comes, and swings her hat;
A handsome girl she is that—that—"
Her entrance stopped what he would say;
In her bright, fascinating way,
She kissed Dame Langdon's cheek, and paid
Rozmer a courtesy most staid.

XI.

Her stay was short. With her adieu
She said: "We all shall welcome you;"
And, blushing, added: "Yesterday
My father feared you'd be away
Next month;—you know we all depend
Upon you acting as our friend;
Captain De Favour knows no one.
Why do you laugh? What have I done?
Must I confess that on that day
A happy bride I'll sail away?
The Captain's yacht waits by the shore
To bear us the wide waters o'er."

XII.

"Let me congratulate you, dear,"
'Squire Langdon said; "and our son here
Leaves very soon to join his bride;
He takes us old folks both beside.
Rozmer, a very happy end—
The Captain a most valued friend."
Fair Fanny, blushing rosy red,
Quick through the lovely valley sped,
Sprang in her little light canoe,
And soon was hidden from their view.

XIII.

Then to his faithful favorite's side,
Who of his love and joy had died,
Rozmer repaired, and hollowed there
A grave, 'mid moss and flowers fair,
Beneath an elm, whose branches deep
In pendent arch from harm would keep
The tablet graven on its bark,
The resting-place of Prince to mark,

On the broad trunk of the old tree
Inscribed in letters bold and free :

XIV.

FIDELITY

Joy burst thy heart, dear faithful friend ;
Mere words are tame to sing thy praise ;
True, fond, devoted to the end,
No monument to thee I raise ;
But may this elm majestic wave
Its noble branches over thee,
To mark thy resting-place, thy grave,
Through many a future century.
No human friendship more could prove
Than thy devotion, loyal, true ;
I mourn for thee and thy great love,
Brave, faithful, noble Prince, adieu !
* * * * *

XV.

Swan Island well became its name ;
There Rozmer often hunted game

Ere Cupid shot the sportsman bold,
Wounding his heart before so cold,
And kindled there a quenchless fire,
And gave him aspirations higher.
The wedding passed with no display,
Save Nature in her bright array;
Their poet friend the groom beside
Was first to greet the rustic bride:

XVI.

“Fanny, two years ago or more
My Iris left a gem she wore;
She wished that I her gift should bring
To you, a precious opal ring,
A flaming jewel, bright and rare,
That you for her should always wear;
So much I loved, I could not part
With that sweet pledge so near my heart:
This diamond of brilliant hue
The loss will compensate to you,

And by your gallant husband's grace,
The ring upon your hand I'll place."

XVII.

The blushing bride with glances shy
Received the gift coquettishly,
Said she had heard a fatal spell
O'er opal gems must ever dwell;
She much preferred the diamond bright,
That sparkled as a star of night,
To stone of changing tint and glow,
As fickle as prismatic bow;
Asked how he dared to keep a thing
So dangerous as an opal ring.

XVIII

He laughing answered her: "The Fate
Found me in such a hopeful state,
Through all her cruel spell of woe,
That she consented to bestow
Another charm more potent still,
That bound the opal to my will,

To win for me my future joy,—
True happiness, without alloy;
Its light has no ill-boding glow;
It shines for me a 'promise-bow.'



CANTO SIXTH.

I.

THE Summer doffed her mantle green
And mellowed into harvest-time;
With regal step the stately queen
Went forth in her maternal prime;
The forests blushed in crimson hues;
The leafy trees, with vines entwined,
Bore impress of her bright adieus—
In glowing colors they combined;
The orange-groves their fruit of gold
Commingled with the buds and bloom;
The amaranth, with bosom cold,
Exulted o'er the early doom
Of the more fragile kind.

II.

In chamber bright with tint of rose
And tapestry that loosely hung
Brodered with Cupids in repose
The trailing vines and flowers among,
On costly furniture there lay
Full many a gauzy fabric fair
That in confusion of display
Were destined for the future wear
And chaste adornment of the bride;
And she in solitude, and free
From all intrusion, here could hide
Amid the flowing drapery
Its ample folds behind.

III.

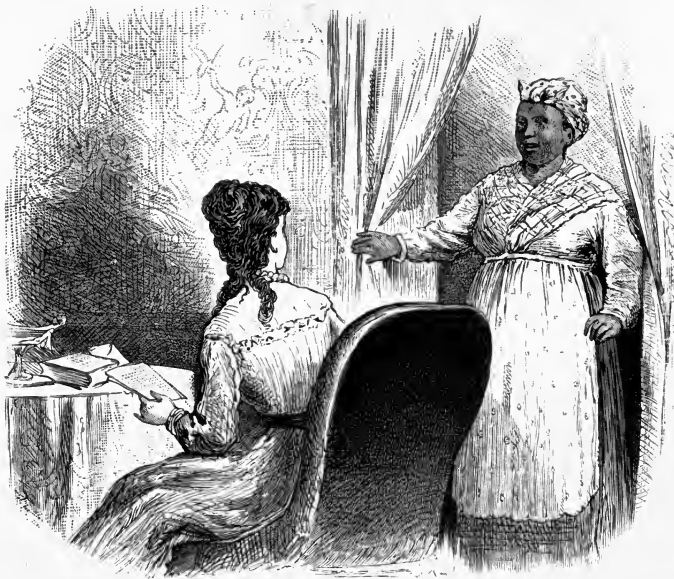
The mocking-birds a medley sung,
In murmurs low the fountain plashed,
The sparrows plunged its foam among,
Bathing in tiny jets that dashed

Over a nymph of beauty rare—
An Aphrodite—born of spray,
Uprising in the misty air
Above the dolphins at their play ;
Through open casement sweet perfume
Of countless blossoms pure and fair
With grateful fragrance filled the room,
And Flora's incense everywhere
The light-winged zephyrs flung.

I V.

Iris, whose raven tresses fell
In rippling flow o'er brow and neck,
Concealing half her bosom's swell,
No flower wore, no gem to deck
Her girlish charms with brilliance bright,
No costly robe of silken sheen,
But snowy muslin, pure and light,
Such as she wore when she had been
With him in his wild Northern home ;
Such garb became her winsome grace,

As she through rural bowers would roam
In that romantic wild-wood place
The rocks and ferns among.



"My chile,—Miss I—ris,—whar you gone?"

V.

She read his letter which the day
Before he left he sent to her,
And now, so near her on his way,
Their meeting he would not defer;

The tender words, inspired by love,
She read in whispers low and sweet:
“Darling, your promises to prove,
I go, as pagan to the feet
Of idol in its sacred shrine,
To bring the flaming gem *I stole*,
That I have coveted as mine,
Your opal ring—pearl with a soul—
To solve its magic spell.”

VI.

Much more was written, but no bird,
In playful dalliance on the spray
Of myrtle vine, could hear a word
Of aught that in the missive lay.
Aroused at last by croaking tone
Of Mammy Cooter, in great glee:
“My chile,—Miss I—ris,—whar you gone?
Here's Massa Rozmer come ter see——
Oh, bress de Lord! she's flu—e—flu,

An' nebber put on nuffin fine,
An' dar was all dem dresses—new,
Wid dat ar frock no better'n mine,
In dat ole buckra style."

VII.

And she did fly as if the air
Wafted her through each corridor,
Till, like a vision passing fair,
The welcome guests she stood before.
The mistress, with true courtesy,
Gave to her friends her kindest care.
The lovers, left alone to be
A few brief precious moments there,
Then Iris, with devotion due,
The parents of her hero sought
With winning fondness warm and true,
That to their faces sunshine brought,—
Contentment's happy smile.

VIII.

Rozmer could scarce believe his eyes:

The ripening graces of three years
Had dignified his lovely prize.

He whispered (only for her ears):

“If I had even thought or known

To what perfection I aspired—

A Queen of Beauty on her throne—

I should all hopeless have admired.

Where did you find such wealth of love,

Unworthy as I still must seem?”

“God gave it me, that I may prove

With true devotion all I deem

Worthy my hero's choice.”

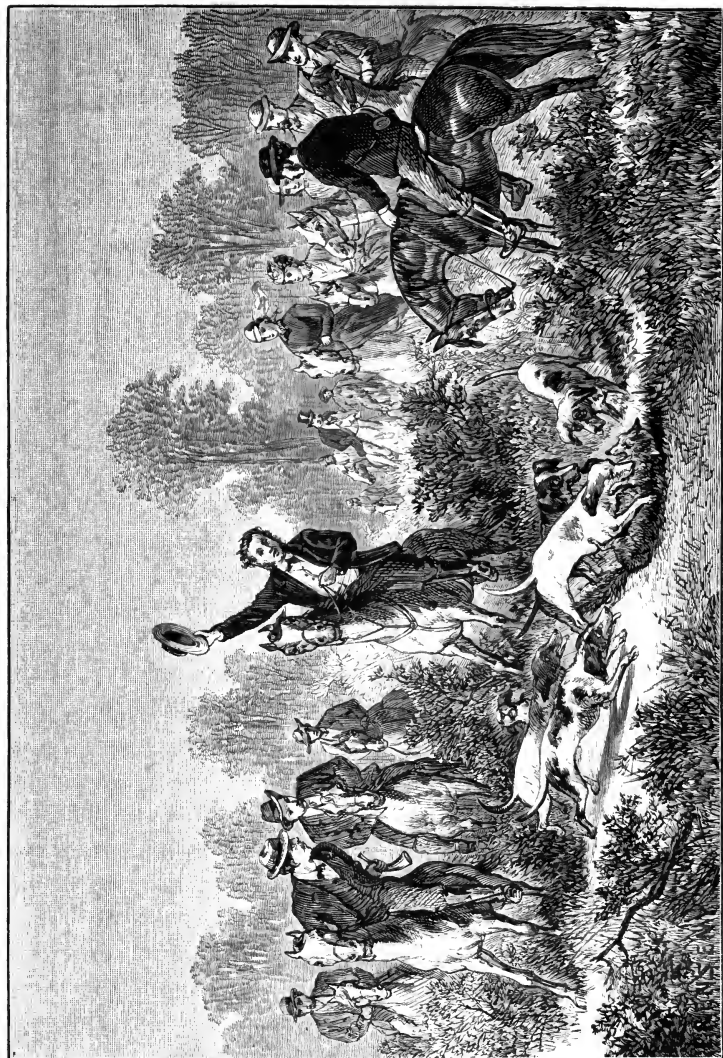
IX.

The pompous 'Squire, as knight of old,

Played the grand gentleman as well,

Full well accustomed thus to hold

His court at home: he'd bravely tell



"EAGER HUNSMEN DEFTLY CLOSE IN CIRCLE NARROWING ROUND THE PRIZE."

The noble guests he chanced to meet
The wonders of his Northern vale,—
The wild-wood sports, some famous feat,
That sounded like a fairy tale,
Of fox-hunt after the first snows;
How hounds, of keenest scent and eyes,
And eager huntsmen deftly close
In circle narrowing round the prize:—
He always won the brush.

X.

A quiet, dignified, true worth
Shone in good Mrs. Langdon's face;
That fine old lady of the North,
Pure, womanly, with modest grace,
Rejoicing with maternal pride,
Developed all those social charms
That now she had no cause to hide;
She girded on those genial arms,
The etiquette of the old school,

That her fond mother's tender care
Strictly enforced by line and rule
Upon her rustic daughters fair,
Their wayward moods to hush.

XI.

The wedding day arrived at last;
Rozmer, impatient, waited near
Her door, and oft his glances cast
For one that now must soon appear.
At last the portals opened wide;—
Half lost amid the flowing lace,
They led her forth, the lovely bride:
Her veil enveloped form and face;
Pure as a Virgin's halo lay
The snowy orange blossoms sweet,
Above her brow, entwined with spray
Of myrtle vine, Love's emblem meet,
Oft named in ancient song.

XII.

Rozmer his grateful pride expressed,
Her answering glances sweetly paid.



"Half lost amid the flowing lace,—the lovely bride."

The 'Squire would have the bride caressed,

But Mammy Cooter was afraid: **Bancroft Libran.**

“Done touch my chile, nor mussen speak ;

De bressed angils hubber neah

De bride, dey tech her lips an’ cheek,

An’ make her like deirselves appear.

Miss Iris’ lubly as a queen.”

Cooter had dressed with care and pride—

Her kerchief white, her favors seen,

Would show the folks dat was her bride,

As she the ranks filed through.

XIII.

Then chimed the eight bells from the dome

Of old St. Michael’s massive tower ;

The same that welcomed Iris home

Awoke the wedding service hour.

Noble the guests, and bright the day,

As if the summer came again,

To smile upon the flowery way.

The Wedding March, that grand refrain,

Echoed through chancel—nave—to spire.

Their vows were paid, the last sweet prayer



"THE WEDDING SERVICE HOUR."

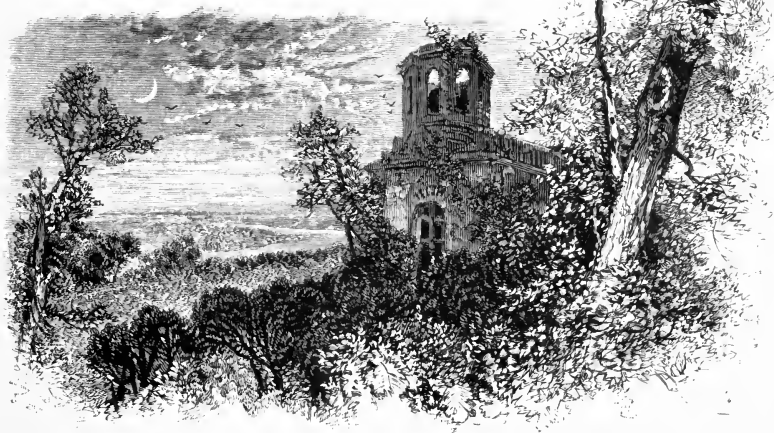
O'er the gray dome ascended higher,
Wafted by holy angels there,
Who hover o'er the true.

XIV.

They paused one moment at the shrine,
As if their bliss to realize,
Most sacred, holy, pure, divine
Of all our human sympathies;
Then, as a talisman to hold
The wedding-ring and guard from harm,
The opal, on its throne of gold,
The bridegroom placed as magic charm.
Confiding love and pleased surprise
Blended her thanks in timid grace,
While blushes warm in rosy dyes
Shone through the shimmering veil of lace,
Like the first glow of morn.

XV.

Much more, dear reader, I could write,
Ere bidding you and yours good-
night,
Of bridal pageantry: the sport
In some suburban, wild resort,
Near old St. George's ruined
tower,
Crumbling within its wild-wood
bower;
Or near the famous Drayton Hall,
With ivy-shrouded tumbling wall,



"Near old St. George's ruined tower."

Where lichens drape the ancient trees,
As if to guard from chilling breeze,



"Or near the famous Drayton Hall."

Enchantment all around, above,
From ruined tower to fragrant grove.

XVI.

'Squire Langdon, like a boy at play,
Kept all the sporting party gay;
Be sure he won the brush, he thought
'Twas his own skill that deftly brought

Him foremost, when the party came
Upon the silver-frosted game.
Proudly his cap he gaily dressed
In trophy granted him as guest.
With bugle-notes, and hounds' deep bay,
The party homeward took their way,
The Ashley's dreamy banks along,
Singing a cheery hunting-song.

S O N G.

I.

The morn hath plumed its wings of light,
Its rosy mist-veil flung
O'er the weird shades of passing night,
The forest gloom among.

Chorus.

Call off the hounds from the fray!
Give to the hunters the rein!
Homeward we'll hasten away,
Singing a merry refrain,
Waking the echoes again,
Echoes,—echoes,—a-gain.

II.

Happy is he who won the brush
To give his lady fair,
While she with beaming eye and blush
The frosted plume shall wear.

Chorus.

Call off the hounds from the fray!
Give to the hunters the rein!
Homeward we'll hasten away,
Singing a merry refrain,
Waking the echoes again,
Echoes,—echoes,—a-gain.

III.

With clattering hoofs and baying hounds
We'll homeward take our way;
The forest our glad cheer resounds
And joins our roundelay.

Chorus.

Call off the hounds from the fray!
Give to the hunters the rein!

Home let us hasten away,
Singing a merry refrain,
Waking the echoes again,
Echoes,—echoes,—a-gain.

Through deep ravines and forest lone
The nymphs invoked, with mimic tone,
Trilled back the musical refrain,
In whispers sweet, "*again! a-gain!*"







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